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In 1953, Eric Olson heard the kind of horrible news that would shatter any nine year old. His father had died violently, having fallen 13 stories from the window of a Manhattan hotel room. The death was ruled a suicide—the result of his dad's recent struggle with depression. Not until Eric was 31 and a clinical psychologist did he learn that Frank Olson had unwittingly taken LSD as part of a CIA mind-control experiment nine days before his death. A 1975 apology from President Gerald Ford followed. Now, with Manhattan D.A. Robert Morgenthau's help, Eric Olson hopes to prove his father did not *jump* out of the window after all.

In 1953, a scientist was slipped a dose of LSD at a CIA retreat. Now, prosecutors are looking into his mysterious death.

FRANK OLSON FILE: THE CIA'S BAD TRIP

Frank Olson toiled as an army "germ warrior," a scientist who develops lethal viruses and toxins for military use. Just before Thanksgiving 1953, Olson and colleagues were summoned to a CIA-army retreat at a secluded camp in western Maryland. Minutes after drinking Cointreau cocktails, the men were told that they had just been dosed with LSD. The Korean War had ended months before, and the feds were analyzing why so many captured Americans had spilled secrets in captivity. The CIA, suspecting chemical persuasion, wanted to study LSD's effects. Frank Olson became one of the agency's "experimental monkeys."

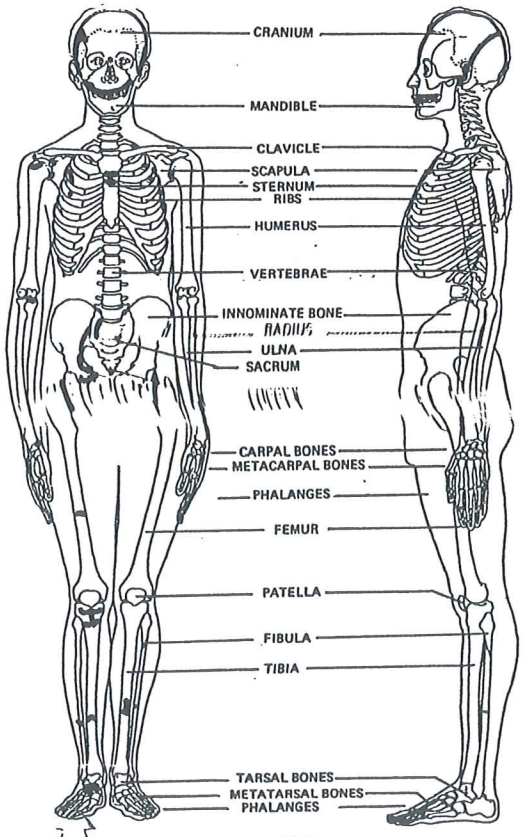

Figure 2. General elements in the human skeleton.

Immediately after the retreat, Olson sunk into a depression. "I've made a terrible mistake," he told his wife and then asked his boss for a new post. His boss phoned Robert Lashbrook, a CIA retreat attendee, who then rushed Olson to Manhattan to see a special doctor—the agency's LSD expert. After two days, they registered Olson in a psychiatric hospital. He died the night before he was to be admitted.

In 1994, Frank Olson's body was exhumed by James Starrs, a top forensic scientist. "We were told we couldn't see the body after he died because of its condition," says Eric Olson. "So I was surprised to see how good he looked. He was embalmed, and I still recognized him 40 years later." According to Starrs's investigation, completed this year, there were no signs of cuts or abrasions from broken glass. What Starrs did find was a severe bruise on Olson's forehead—not enough to have resulted from the fall but enough to have knocked him uncon- [illegible] criminal wrongdoing," Starrs says.

This October, prosecutors are investigating the old evidence through a new historical cases unit. Lashbrook and his bosses—former CIA director Richard Helms and mind-control expert Sidney Gottlieb—are expected to be questioned. "By the time this is over, you will know how your father really died," a New York prosecutor told Olson.

"The implications kind of frighten me," says Olson. "But the story has just never checked out. After 43 years, I feel like I'm back where I was at nine years old, scratching my head."—*Melissa Roth*

Clockwise from top: Frank Olson holding his son Eric; Olson in happier days; the new forensic examiner's record of Olson's mysterious wounds.